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PUTNAM TRAVELER

Supporting Tourism & Communities in Northeastern, CT & Beyond...

ISSUE NO. 45 • NORTHEASTERN, CONNECTICUT

DOWNTOWN MAP INSIDE • JANUARY - MARCH 2015

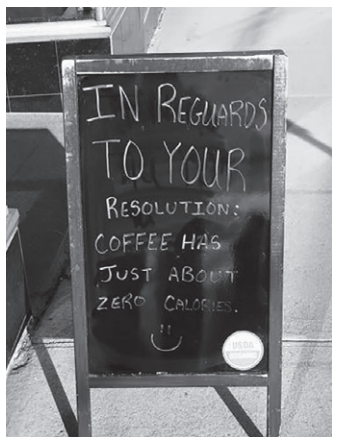
For an afternoon, a day, or a weekend...come and enjoy Northeastern Connecticut!

Fire & Ice Festival - Downtown Putnam (*Photo courtesy of Discover Putnam*)

Happy New Year from the Putnam Traveler! Need a reason to getaway or take a stay-cation? We have dedicated this issue of the Traveler to food and beverages served right here in the Quiet Corner. This issue features locally brewed beer, gourmet coffee, gourmet olive oil & vinegar, kitchenware plus cooking classes, natural foods, vitamins and homeopathic remedies, the area's first wine cellar for private parties and intimate dining, and the Fire and Ice Festival's chocolate contest! Of course, this is just a sampling of the offerings available here. ***The Stomping Ground*** serves lunch and dinner daily Wednesday through Sunday and unique beer on tap each night, ***The Vanilla Bean*** is always serving up something delicious, ***The Inn at Woodstock Hill*** and ***The Mansion at Bald Hill*** serves brunch, lunch and dinner, ***Taylor Brooke Winery*** produces award-winning wine served at area restaurants and on premises, ***Victoria Station Café*** offers a large menu of hot beverages and sweet treats, ***Martha's Herbary*** carries wonderful herbs, cook books and classes, ***Pomfret Spirit Shop*** offers a wide variety of wine and specialty liquors. Too many to list – we hope you enjoy this issue of the ***Putnam Traveler!***

INSIDE:

Local Advertisers...Local Real Estate... Downtown Putnam Events...85 Main's New Wine Cellar...85 Main Uncorks a Unique Space for private parties and intimate dining including a special wine menu...***Harvest Moon Health Food Store***...This hidden treasure features a cornucopia of wellness right here in Putnam...If you love beer you need to visit ***Black Pond Brews***, located in the basement of Danielson Adventure Sports to see what's being served at the one and only Quiet Corner brewery... Discover ***Ben's Beans...***Going Beyond Great Coffee...Ben's sells locally crafted gourmet beans available to coffee lovers everywhere...***NOMA***...Putnam's high-end kitchen store features home décor, kitchen items, fancy olive oils and occasional workshops...And ***The Fire & Ice Festival*** held in Downtown Putnam features fun for the whole family!



Downtown Putnam & Area Maps • Businesses • Local Activities • Shopping & Events

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2015 FIRE & ICE FESTIVAL • Downtown Putnam
Saturday, February 14th 10am - 10pm

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NEW WINE CELLAR
Uncorks Unique Dining Options

Like a hearty winter stew, a good idea that simmers for a while, gets even better. For James Martin, chef owner of 85 Main in Putnam and his business partners, Barry and Brian Jessurun, the idea of renovating the basement of their lively, downtown restaurant has been on their minds.

BY NANCY P. WEISS

They needed time to focus to make their vision a reality. Barry Jessurun worked in the theatre and used his experience with set design, especially his skill with lighting, to transform the space into a warm, welcoming dining area. Under Jessurun's direction, every portion was upgraded and transformed. Now open, The Wine Cellar adds a new dimension to the burgeoning food scene in northeastern Connecticut.

Martin, voted 2014 Restaurateur of the Year by the Connecticut Restaurant Association, was exposed early in his culinary education to great wines. As part of the team at the East Coast Grill in Cambridge, he was given the responsibility of preparing the daily Proprietor's List, a changing tableau of wines that were selected to pair with daily specials. He took notes on what the tasters observed and kept track of the trends in wine consumption.

Now Martin and Barry and Brian Jessurun want to bring heightened engagement with wine to the Wine Cellar at 85 Main. They want to educate people about various aspects of wine while also offering them a pleasant space in which to enjoy themselves. Best of all for patrons of the Wine Cellar, the owners will pass on the good values they get from select vintners to consumers. Rather that doubling or tripling the cost of a bottle, the Wine Cellar will present a price list that varies based on what is negotiated with purveyors.

The room features a stone wine cave lined with shelves and bins brimming with hand-selected wines. Three large aerial photographs of Connecticut vineyards, taken by Woodstock artist, G. Leslie Sweetnam, add interest and depth to a long wall, painted in earthy tones. Butcher block counters and table tops add to the décor, making the room, which can seat 30 people at a seated dinner or 34 standing, a fine venue for small parties, business meetings, rehearsal dinners, birthday celebrations and showers.

"We want to extend value. Our patrons are indulging in better wines and I want to share with them what I have learned without prohibitive prices," Martin said.

The space will be used for more than private dining. There will be a series of chef tables, chef demonstrations, including guest appearances by celebrity chefs and educational programs.

The Wine Cellar will feature a separate wine list, proper wine service and menus that pair well with specific wines.

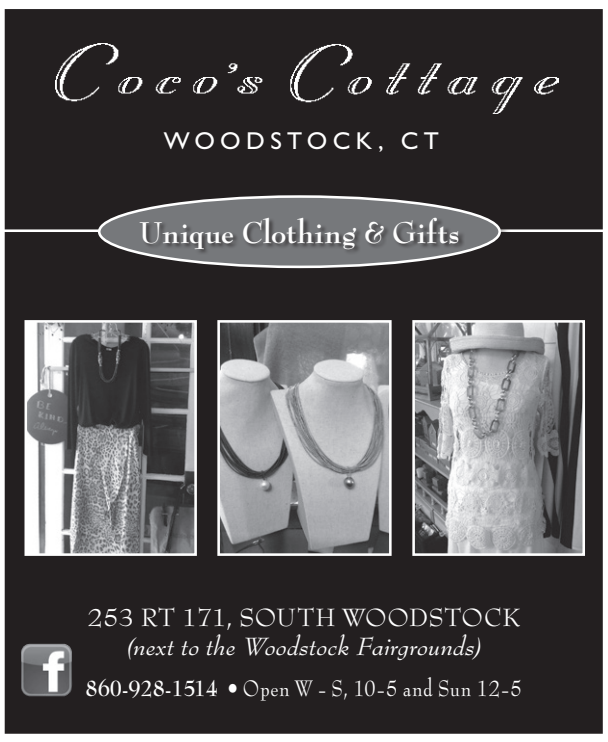
"My favorite winemaker is Ken Wright from Ken Wright Cellars. Wright came up with the #1 location in the US for making pinot noir, Oregon. He has a dozen vineyards and we have bought a case of wine from each one. We will feature a different Wright Vineyard every month," Martin said, giving an example of the plans he has for the Wine Cellar.

Co-owner Brian Jessurun noted: "People want big, bold flavors and the Oregon pinot noirs are phenomenal. Pinot noir pairs well with the food we serve at 85 Main."

Barry Jessurun said: "The area needed a space for private, intimate dinners that meets the standard of food and service set by 85 Main. The Wine Cellar will get people talking and will add a new space, especially on Friday and Saturday nights for quieter dining."

"We want to do something creative of real quality. We will showcase local products and people as well as welcome national and international experts in food and wine," Martin said as he glanced around the cellar that promises to hold many lively gatherings.

For reservations and to be on the mailing list for special events, contact Dawn@85main.com or call 860-928-1660.



A *Treasure* Hidden in Plain Sight

Harvest Moon is just steps away from Route 44, heading east out of Putnam. But it's tucked away and people miss it if they're not watching out... which has got to change! Upon arriving, you will find that the doors open into a welcoming shop, packed full of wonderful, healthy items. It's a cornucopia of wellness, right in Putnam.

BY JENNIFER HELLER

Linda and Tom Tagg have owned Harvest Moon for 10 years and have developed an inventory built on meeting the needs and requests of their customers. The shop, with it's cheerful, cozy atmosphere, is presided over by a pleasant, knowledgeable staff who are happy to answer questions about their many products but give you space to browse. It's a bit of a Cheers meets convenience store with a Whole Foods twist kind of place - everyone knows your name and you can buy hard to find necessities as well as indulgent treats.

I am a browser, so while I amble around, discovering healthy treasures, I shamelessly eavesdrop as Linda offers guidance to customers, helping them find what they are looking for. Meanwhile Tom catches up with other customers, making sure one is recovering well from surgery, welcoming another, and ringing up others who pop in and out quickly, picking up supplies and a friendly word.

Harvest Moon stocks a wide variety of supplements as well as homeopathic remedies, and Linda is adept at helping customers pick the best ones to meet their needs. They also carry essential oils, and natural home, health, and beauty aids, not to mention their allergen-free food products, including gluten, dairy, and soy free foods. The options range from flours, pastas and baking mixes to snacks or frozen and refrigerated goods. They have many quality brand names and source locally as well. They want to make connections between local vendors and customers. You can buy fresh eggs from nearby farms (always chicken eggs, but also duck eggs when they are in season), Buttercup raw milk, and local honey. Glancing at the back shelves, there is yet another section, packed with a selection of bulk dried fruits, nuts, seeds and over 100 dried herbs and spices.

I feel like I've fallen into a reverse Genie in a Bottle - how does so much good stuff fit into such a small place? And I haven't even talked about the Wall of Tea yet: Yogi, Alvita, Choice, Traditional Medicinals, and more. Teas to help you sleep or give you energy, digestive aids, cold remedies and simple hot teas perfect for a cold winter's day.

With their mix of friendly, knowledgeable service, a wide variety of goods and quality selection, you'll be glad you took the short jaunt to Harvest Moon. **It is behind Cargill Chevrolet in the Colonial Plaza and is open every day of the week. Call or visit them online (860) 928-2352.**
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BLACK POND BREWS

If you love beer you need to visit the basement of Danielson Adventure Sports to see what's being served at the one and only Quiet Corner brewery. An unassuming concrete room on the lower level of the historic train station in downtown Danielson is home to Black Pond Brews. Like many unique small businesses, Black Pond Brews was born as the hobby of two good friends, Cory Smith and Mike Teed.

BY CRIS CADIZ

Self described "swamp Yankees" who grew up in the Quiet Corner, Cory and Mike are Woodstock Academy alumni from the class of 2005. They started brewing in 2010, when Mike received a home brew kit for Christmas. Brewed on New Year's Eve, their first batch was "not that good"—according to Cory--but these friends soon developed a knack for creating interesting and tasty recipes. They started entering regional home brew contests and winning awards. "We brewed all the time when we were home brewing...we really liked the process and the ability to be scientific and creative at the same time," says Cory. "We're home brewers gone mad, I guess."

In the summer of 2012, after winning numerous home brew awards and getting some neutral feedback on the quality of their product, they decided to form a business. "We got to the point where we were winning ribbons in everything we entered. That was the last piece that justified us going forward," says Cory. Two years of research followed plus significant investments of money, time and equipment until they were ready to open to the public in October of 2014.

CT Uncommon lager, Razorblades IPA and Israel Putnam Brown Ale are a few of the tried and true recipes they brew often year-round. Cory & Mike are constantly coming up with new recipes and tinkering with ones that show long-term promise. Every week, you might find something new on their menu board, most reflecting their own special brand of humor and style. One of my favorites, despite its somewhat misogynistic name, is Sexy Bitch, a smooth dark Belgian style beer. Other amusingly named brews include Widowmaker, an imperial coffee stout; Salute Your Schwarz, a schwarzbier, or dark pilsner; and Gruvis Malt, a rye porter named after "a pretty awesome band from Rhode Island."

"We brew new recipes maybe 3-4 times a month," says Cory, who explains that these are often simply inspired by what ingredients they have on hand at the time. "Sometimes an idea pops into our heads and we order ingredients to make that batch. We have been brewing long enough to know what flavors we can get from different ingredients. We utilize that knowledge to come up with something that is appropriate to a style or something entirely new and different."

To make a single batch of beer takes a roughly seven-hour brew day, two to three weeks to ferment and a few days to carbonate. When a batch is done, it is dispensed from small kegs to customers in growlers—glass bottles that hold either 32 or 64 ounces. Folks are always welcome to taste test what's available.

Black Pond Brews also distributes to a few local watering holes, including Maury's Pub and the Whistling Train Saloon in Danielson. "We like to keep it local whenever possible," says Cory, who describes a coffee stout they recently brewed with coffee from the Steampunk Café on Main Street. "We brewed another stout yesterday with coffee and we forgot to get coffee ahead of time so we just walked over there." Black Pond Brews has logo T-shirts, sweatshirts, and banners made by Up Top Screen Printing, also located in Danielson.

Because both Cory and Mike work full-time jobs during the week, Black Pond Brews is only open for tastings and growler fills for limited hours on weekends. This seems to be fine for their steadily growing group of consumers—for now, at least. They are increasing their customer base mostly through social media, word of mouth and folks who try their beer at the local pubs and realize Black Pond Brews are located just down the street.

Versatility and variety might be one thing that keeps customers coming back to Black Pond Brews. Their brewing system allows them to create several different sized batches at once. About 8 or 9 different kinds of beer were fermenting during the evening I visited. "We're not making a whole lot of anything, but we're making a lot of different kinds," says Cory. "We brew at least one new batch every week and one staple/flagship batch on top of that."

...continued on page 8

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Immediate plans for expansion include improving their brewing system with specialized equipment and adding larger fermenters to allow them to brew double the batch sizes they can currently produce. "We'll be able to supply more places locally with our beer and hopefully that sends more people here for growlers," says Cory. "We're trying to expand at a sustainable level so we don't get too far into debt at any point. As of right now we've done a decent job establishing ourselves and not being in the hole."

"Keeping it local is important to us because we were both born and raised here," says Cory. "Over the years we have seen a lot of support from our community. Spending money on local business keeps money in our community and builds a stronger connection with our neighbors that will help us build a flourishing economy and keep jobs and residents here. Connecticut has one of the highest emigration rates in the country because the business opportunities are scarce and we can't change that by leaving or spending money at national chains."

Annual events Black Pond Brews participates in are Harmonies & Hops in May, Thread City Hops Festival in Willimantic in April, and Tastes of the Valley in Woodstock in late summer. "We like to do tastings that are more local since we are more likely to get people to come in more frequently." Keeping it small and local is also a way to honor brewing's long history. "Before Prohibition and all throughout Europe, every town had their own brewery. We want to be the local establishment to go to," says Cory. "I think there's over 3,000 breweries in the country now and I believe we are headed back towards that. Obviously you want to have outstanding beers and do something you can't get anywhere else, but we want to be part of the scene and bring brewing back to its roots." **For more information, visit their website www.blackpondbrews.com and their Facebook page.**

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"BEN'S BEANS:
GOING BEYOND GREAT COFFEE"

BY JENNIFER HELLER

Coffee is a daily ritual for many of us, and Jeff and Heather Klusek have opened Ben's Beans to make that ritual even more deliciously satisfying. Like numerous others, Jeff discovered coffee while in college. Not only was the late-night fuel essential to his studies, it also became his income when he took a job as a barista and became passionate about how delicious coffee could be. It's hard to enjoy an industrially processed, chemically laden beverage when you've tasted the real thing. Good coffee became a habit for him, and when he met and married his wife, Heather, she became a convert. Jeff became interested in the process coffee beans go through on their way from the field to the cup and tried his hand at buying his coffee beans green and roasting them himself. He found roasting coffee beans to be addictively fun and intriguingly complicated. Much like a self-taught artist, he learned how to bring out the best qualities in each variety. Friends started asking him to roast for them, and word got out about his "coffee-whispering." Then the demand grew steadily - too steadily to keep it a hobby.

This was an answer to another puzzle Jeff and Heather had been working on. Tiring of working for others, they were itching to open their own business. This was their eureka! solution - open a business centered on what they enjoyed, were good at, and people appreciated. The coffee culture in New England is growing and Jeff and Heather say one of the most fun things about opening Ben's Beans is the new friends that they have made. "People who love coffee are passionate about it!"

As they were getting ready to launch into the coffee business, Jeff was learning more about the coffee industry, and discovering some unsavory facts. The coffee industry is "a terribly broken system and has been for hundreds of years." The primary goal is to bring cheap coffee to the US, disregarding both the quality of the product and the people involved in the process to get coffee from bean to mug. Thankfully, coffee drinkers in the last 20-30 years have realized that a tasty brew starts with quality coffee beans. And one of the most important ways to enable farmers to grow good quality coffee beans is to pay them fair prices for a high quality product.

Coffee plants, much like wine grapes, are notoriously finicky about where they produce the finest fruit. Coffee grows best at high altitudes in tropical regions - areas of the world that are also home to grinding poverty. Commercial coffee farmers growing coffee for sale are generally selling in quantity, and receive a price at or below their cost of production. There is simply no incentive for them to grow for quality. This is where Fair Trade and Direct Purchasing

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comes in. By giving farmers a fair price for quality coffee they have profit to invest back into their land, as well as to afford their families sufficient food, clean water and send their children to school.

This is a business model that understands that paying a fair price for a cup of coffee is actually a better cost value in the big picture - it's a better value for the many people involved in the coffee industry and the earth where the beans grow, not to mention fewer chemicals in my bloodstream!

This concept ignited Jeff and Heather, and they took a bet that the inhabitants of the Quiet Corner would agree with them - great coffee is a wonderful thing. Then they took it a step further. "Be the change you wish to see in the world," said Mahatma Gandhi, and Ben's Beans is a demonstration that a business can be for-profit and still be a positive force for change in the world. As a college student, Jeff traveled to Timbuktu, Mali and was forever changed by the poverty he witnessed. "You can't un-see that." For every bag of coffee sold, Ben's Beans makes a donation to one of their three partner organizations, which operate in coffee producing countries. Mercy Ships, Water.org, and Kids Alive! and are their three partners and they have links to each of these organizations on the Ben's Beans website.

Their primary focus was on roasting excellent coffee beans for retail and wholesale so that people could brew and drink a great cup at home, but they also realized that a storefront presence was essential. So with enthusiasm, and 6 month-old baby Ben in tow, in July of 2014 they launched both businesses together.

By keeping it simple, Ben's Beans produces coffee that appeals to a variety of palates. They sell their roasted coffee beans by the pound and can grind them to your specifications. Monthly "Coffee Club" subscriptions with free local delivery and free shipping are available.

Businesses can purchase coffee wholesale and Ben's Beans is sold or served at Heirloom Cafe, Coriander Cafe, Harvest Moon, Willimantic Co-op and Mrs. Bridges Pantry, among others.

The cafe may have originally been an afterthought to the beans, but it is a delightful setting to enjoy their delicious coffee or a selection of teas. They serve a variety of Nutty Grace's baked goods as well as fair traded chocolates. Jeff, Heather, and any of the baristas are happy to chat about their coffee. In fact, classes are on the radar, so stay tuned for upcoming events.

Jeff and Heather strive for excellence: excellent coffee, excellent service, excellent treatment for the producers of their coffee and giving back to those in need. It gives Jeff joy to talk to customers about the process, quality and industry behind coffee. And he feels that he is benefiting people on both ends of the process - which is a job well done. Too wildly naive you say? It'll never fly? **Well, stop in and try Ben's Beans - you might just be the next coffee convert! Visit them online at www.bensbeans.org**

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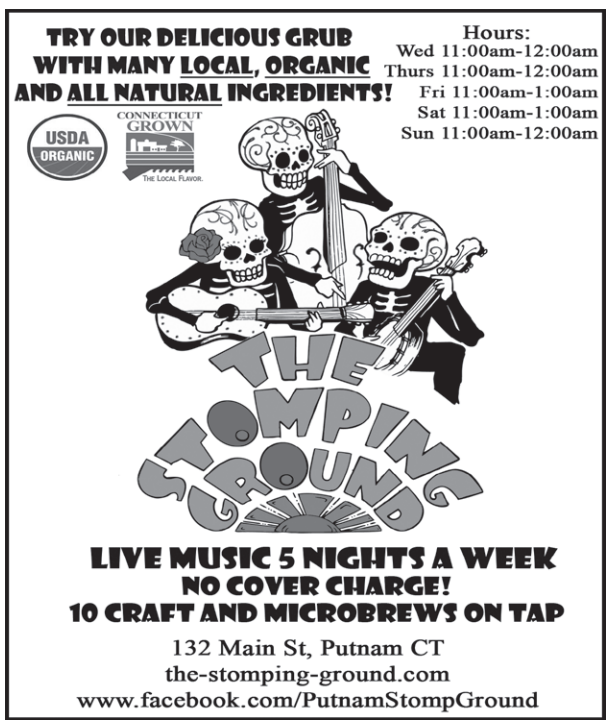
NOMA: Taste for the Good Life

George Melendez and Esperanza Gomez know what they want when they see it.
On one of their first visits to downtown Putnam three years ago, Esperanza turned to George and said: "I want to own that building," as she pointed to a partially renovated location that once housed a bank and offices. Today, NOMA is written prominently on the façade and a busy, stylish kitchen and home business is open to the public.

NANCY P. WEISS

The journey for George and Esperanza to Putnam has been circuitous. Born in Philadelphia, the two grew up together and fell in love at age 13. Later Esperanza and her family moved to California, where she began a career in real estate. Esperanza and George married other people and divorced. Seven years ago, they found each other again on Facebook and knew that the spark of attraction burned as brightly as when they were teenagers. They married and moved to Woodstock where George is in charge of the global supply chain for Crabtree & Evelyn.



As the couple settled in to their new surroundings, Esperanza sought a retail space to sell a variety of items. One day George took her to lunch in Putnam and afterwards surprised her by showing her space in the Montgomery Ward building that he had just leased for her business. The first version of NOMA was soon open.

George and Esperanza were interested in offering a line of high quality olive oils and vinegars. They needed the right location and soon George began negotiating with the owners of the building at 135 Main Street that had originally caught Esperanza's eye. A deal was crafted and renovation began in earnest.

The ground floor of the building, a striking, and stucco edifice was renovated in 10 months. Work continues on the remainder of the space, but with 3,509 square feet, George was ready to open tasting bars for olive oils and vinegars that he had specially sourced.

"We think we are the largest olive oil tasting bar in the nation. Most are 600-1600 square feet. When we validate the number, we plan to promote it," George said with a smile.

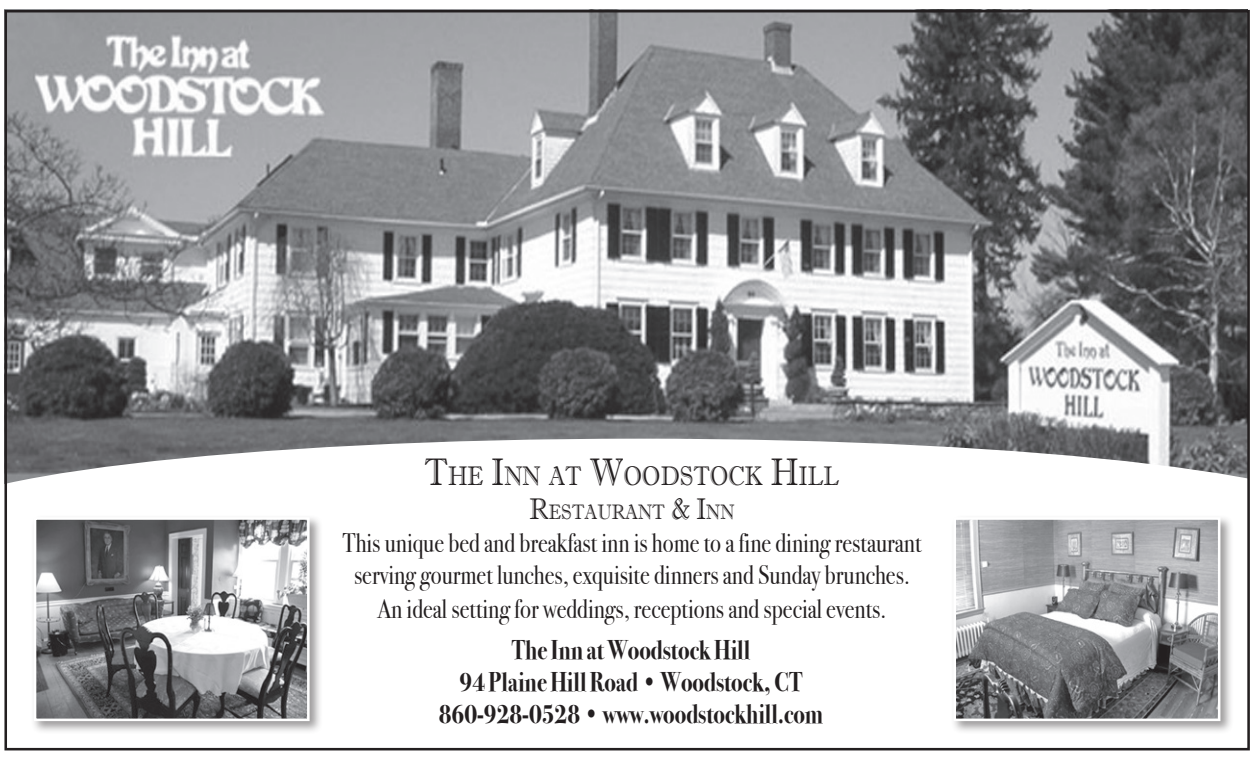
Shiny containers of infused olive oils line one wall at NOMA, which Melendez imports from around the world from companies that follow the harvest and press the olives within hours of being picked. Many of the oils are infused with fruit essences such as blood orange and fig.

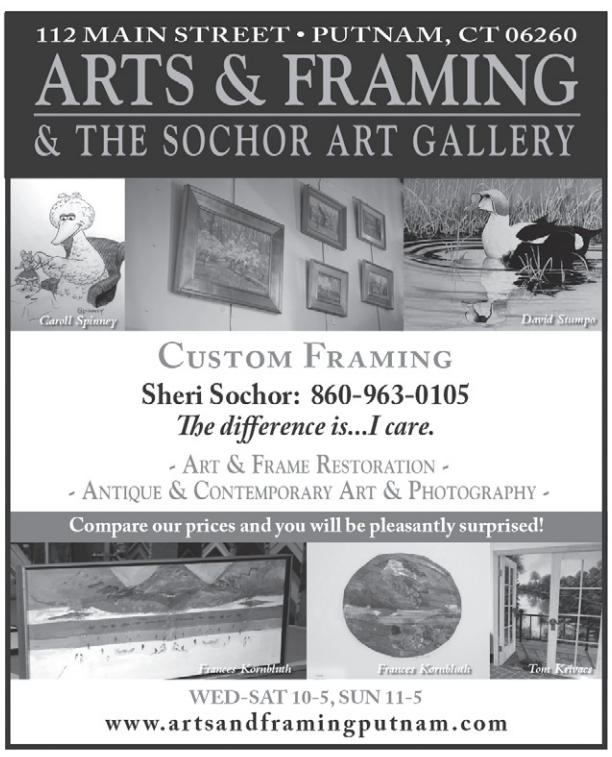
On an opposite wall are gleaming containers of vinegars, including one that has been aged for 75 years.

The name, NOMA, was chosen because George and Esperanza thought Main Street ran north and south and NOMA was a version of north main. While that is not the actual direction of the street, the name stuck, along with George's signature touch, the bright red color of the letter, O.

Renovating and designing the lay out of the building was a joint project for the couple. George has worked in retail since 1982 when he was on the team that developed the point-of-sale system for inventory control and Kmart. Later he has his own software company, which became a certified partner with Microsoft, as well as global positions with major corporations.

"I've lived and traveled globally and worked with wine and chocolate for 7 years. I've visited many vineyards in Europe and met most of the owners, staying in their chateaux





in France. That's why one gets a feeling of Europe when entering our business," George said.

Plans focus on dedicating a large area in the building to chocolate. A chocolate bar in the rear will feature hot cocoa, chocolate truffles, bars and pastries. A case on the glistening center island holds liquor infused chocolates flown in from Coppeneur, a chocolatier based in German, including a cabernet soufflé in a chocolate cup the size of a shot glass.

Private label pasta, homemade in Washington State, will also figure prominently. NOMA will offer over 30 flavors that are cholesterol and egg free. The first shipment sold out quickly and the next will feature chocolate, dark calamari and basil pastas among other tastes.

NOMA will offer educational programs and tastings two or three times per month. Guest chefs and food specialists will demonstrate their techniques in cooking, baking and innovating techniques. The small group experiences will be advertised on the website. By registering online one can reserve a spot at the events, which Melendez has designed to appeal to anyone who enjoys good food.

Recipes are posted every week on the website to encourage home cooks to experiment with new flavors and try items offered at the store.

A visit to NOMA is like stepping in to a high-end shop in a city. From unique items for home décor, fancy aprons, elegant table linens, a line of gourmet seasonings to charming bibelots imported from Columbia, SA, where Esperanza has relatives, to olive oils and vinegars, the shop represents good taste with an international flair.

Esperanza Gomes and George Melendez clearly know what they want and know how to make it happen.

NOMA is located at 135 Main Street, Putnam, CT 06260. Reach them at: www.NOMAHOME.Com and follow them on Facebook or at info@nomahome.com. Telephone 860-928-4750. NOMA is open 6 days a week. Closed on Mondays. See website for details.

"Discover the Romance of Downtown Putnam"

Fire & Ice Festival 2015

Just when you think winter will never end and that there is nothing that could possibly draw you out on a February weekend, historic Downtown Putnam will come to the rescue with the 4th Annual Fire & Ice Festival. On Saturday, February 14th, escape the winter blahs with a romantic and exciting event organized by the Putnam Business Association, local merchants, and community volunteers. The public is invited to attend this festive winter happening, complete with ice sculptures, horse & carriage rides, luminaria, fire torches, live music, and more.

Families and couples alike will fall in love with the creative offerings of this event, which will run from 10am to 9 pm. Family-friendly activities include family carriage rides from 11am to 3pm, fun photo boards, and live ice carving demonstrations throughout the Main Street area. Putnam's Fire & Ice is the largest single ice block carving festival in New England and organizers look to top last year's record of 25 ice sculptures.

A chocolate contest hosted at The Empty Spaces Project Gallery at 114 Main Street will feature creations by chefs, students, and novices on display throughout the day. After sunset, luminaria will fill downtown Putnam with an ambient glow. Fire torches will help light the way for romantic carriage rides from 5pm to 9pm. Be on the lookout for fire dancing performances and warm up with cocktails and a special meal at one of Putnam's many restaurants.

According to 85 Main Owner and Chef James Martin, in 2014 the festival drew over 3,000 people to town. Four years ago, the Putnam Business Association gathered to brainstorm ideas for a winter event that would help all businesses capitalize on this popular holiday. "Valentine's Day is a big day for the restaurants, not so much for the shops," says Victoria Station Café Owner Christina Donatelli-Anderson. "And February is usually a tough month for most of the businesses downtown. We have festivals and events all year long in Putnam except for winter, so we thought why don't we put something on in February? And Putnam, to me anyway, just reeks of romance. It's the perfect place for a romantic festival."

Stay tuned for more information on carriage ticket sales, restaurant specials, and a radio contest from WINY 1350 AM to win a romantic evening for two lucky sweethearts. Dark and milk chocolate bars sold throughout Putnam have prizes tucked into select candy bar wrappers – including tickets for a romantic carriage ride and a Samsung Galaxy Tablet 4 from Savage Systems. Visit www.DiscoverPutnam.com for all the details.

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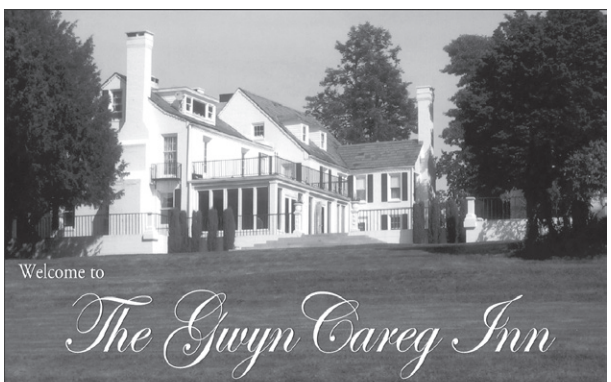
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